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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1427
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1604
RUEPADJ/CJTF-HOA J2X CAMP LEMONIER DJ
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASMARA 000705

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LONDON, PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

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TAGS: PREL KREC ASEC ER

SUBJECT: GSE INTERFERENCE WITH OPERATIONS AT OTHER
DIPLOMATIC MISSION IN ASMARA

Classified By: CDA Jennifer A. McIntyre, for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d).

¶11. (C) Summary: The Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) continues to selectively tweak diplomatic missions in Asmara on operational issues. After fifteen months of renovating a new Embassy building, the South Africans were informed they could not move into the building. The British, Norwegians, and Germans have yet to resolve their months-old impasse over their diplomatic pouches. Many Missions have not been granted courtesy calls with the new Foreign Minister yet, who assumed his position in June. While the U.S. still gets top billing as the Mission targeted with the most restrictions, other diplomatic Missions also face operational difficulties created by the GSE. End Summary.

GSE TELLS SOUTH AFRICANS THEY CAN'T MOVE IN

¶12. (C) Fifteen months after signing a lease agreement and paying rent and renovation costs in order to move the Embassy to a larger facility, the GSE told the South African Embassy that they would not be able to occupy the building. The building, formerly occupied by USAID, is located across the street from the wall of the Presidential compound. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Head of Protocol Fesseha Ghebrehiwet informed South African First Secretary Cynthia Daniels on June 6, "there is a problem with the building. You can't have it." He pointed out that a gate to the Presidential compound was located across the street from the building. When Ms. Daniels replied that the South African Embassy had been renting the building with the full knowledge of the GSE for over one year, Fesseha professed he had no idea that this was the building they were renting. Ms. Daniels informed Fesseha she would have to speak with the Ambassador about the issue and requested the Eritreans provide an explanation for their disapproval in writing.

¶13. (C) The following week, the South Africans received a note verbale from the GSE informing them they could not occupy the building. The South Africans contacted the building landlord, an Eritrean citizen, who was shocked by the GSE's decision. A few days later, the landlord met with Fesseha and presented his legal lease documents. Fesseha disregarded the documents, repeating that the South Africans would not be able to occupy by building and added that the GSE was considering seizing the building for its own use. The landlord requested that the GSE provide him a written

document indicating the government's intention to take the building from him and/or that he is prohibited from leasing the building to the South Africans. To date, the landlord has not received anything in writing from the GSE.

¶4. (C) The MFA then offered to help the South Africans find another building. Using a South African embassy vehicle and GSE-provided local agent, Ms. Daniels spent an entire day looking at vacant buildings in Asmara. All were buildings she had already seen, and deemed unsuitable, nearly 17 months ago when she first identified the former USAID building for the new Embassy facility. At one point, the GSE offered to move out of a government office and provide the South Africans with that building. The building offered was completely run-down and insufficient to the South Africans' space needs.

¶5. (C) During the week of August 6, the South Africans received a second note verbale from the GSE. In this note, the GSE claimed that the South Africans could not use the former USAID building due to security concerns and because the Asmara municipality had re-zoned the entire area. (Note: The Yemeni Embassy recently moved into the former Libyan Embassy which is only one block from the Presidential Compound. End Note.) The South Africans continue to be extremely frustrated by the GSE actions. In addition to losing a building after fifteen months of rental payments and renovation costs (and for a building which they have never even occupied), the South African Embassy must now manage the storing of supplies and furniture, recently arrived, which was ordered specifically to fit their new space. They anticipate that within the next two weeks two more containers of buildings supplies will arrive in Eritrea.

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OTHER MISSIONS WRESTLE WITH UNRESOLVED POUCH PROBLEMS

¶6. (C) The saga continues of the detained diplomatic pouches of the Germans, Norwegians, British, and Netherlands. Thus far, all Missions but the Netherlands, have stood fast to the principle of the inviolability of the pouch. In July, the Germans decided to return their pouches unopened after the GSE refused to let them take possession without inspection or provide a listing of the items enclosed. The Germans have told us that they plan to wait a while and then quietly try to send in another pouch. The British pouches, detained nearly five months ago, remain at the airport. The British have refused to allow inspection or to provide the GSE with an itemized listing. The British have also (unsuccessfully) insisted that if the GSE will not allow the British Embassy to take possession of the bags unhindered, then the GSE should pay to return the bags to London. The Norwegians' diplomatic pouches also continue to languish in the airport. The Norwegian Ambassador informed post, prior to his departure several weeks ago for annual leave, that the Norwegian MFA planned to call in the Eritrean Charge during the week of August 1 to demand an explanation. Post will not learn the outcome of this meeting until the return of the Ambassador at the end of this week; however, the Norwegian Charge noted that the GSE has taken no action to release their pouches to date. The Netherlands Embassy, whose pouches were detained for several weeks in the spring, acceded to the GSE's request for an itemized inventory. Upon provided this listing, the GSE released the items without inspecting them. Post has heard rumors that other Missions in town may be allowing inspection or providing itemized inventories, allowing them to bring in their diplomatic pouches.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) The GSE continues to stonewall all diplomatic Missions on discussing resolutions to the continuing detention of pouches and other violations of the Vienna Convention. The MFA has consistently responded to the Missions' formal protests by stating that the GSE's "internal regulations" allow inspection of diplomatic bags, while refusing to acknowledge that their "internal regulations" violate their treaty obligations. Nor do GSE actions indicate that the government plans to address these issues anytime soon. In an August 24 meeting with the MFA's Americas Division (to be reported septel), Charge raised the issue of the diplomatic pouch again, with no response. Post notes that many of the Missions (including ours and the UK) have not been granted even formal courtesy calls with the new Foreign Minister, who assumed his duties in June. End Comment.

MCINTYRE